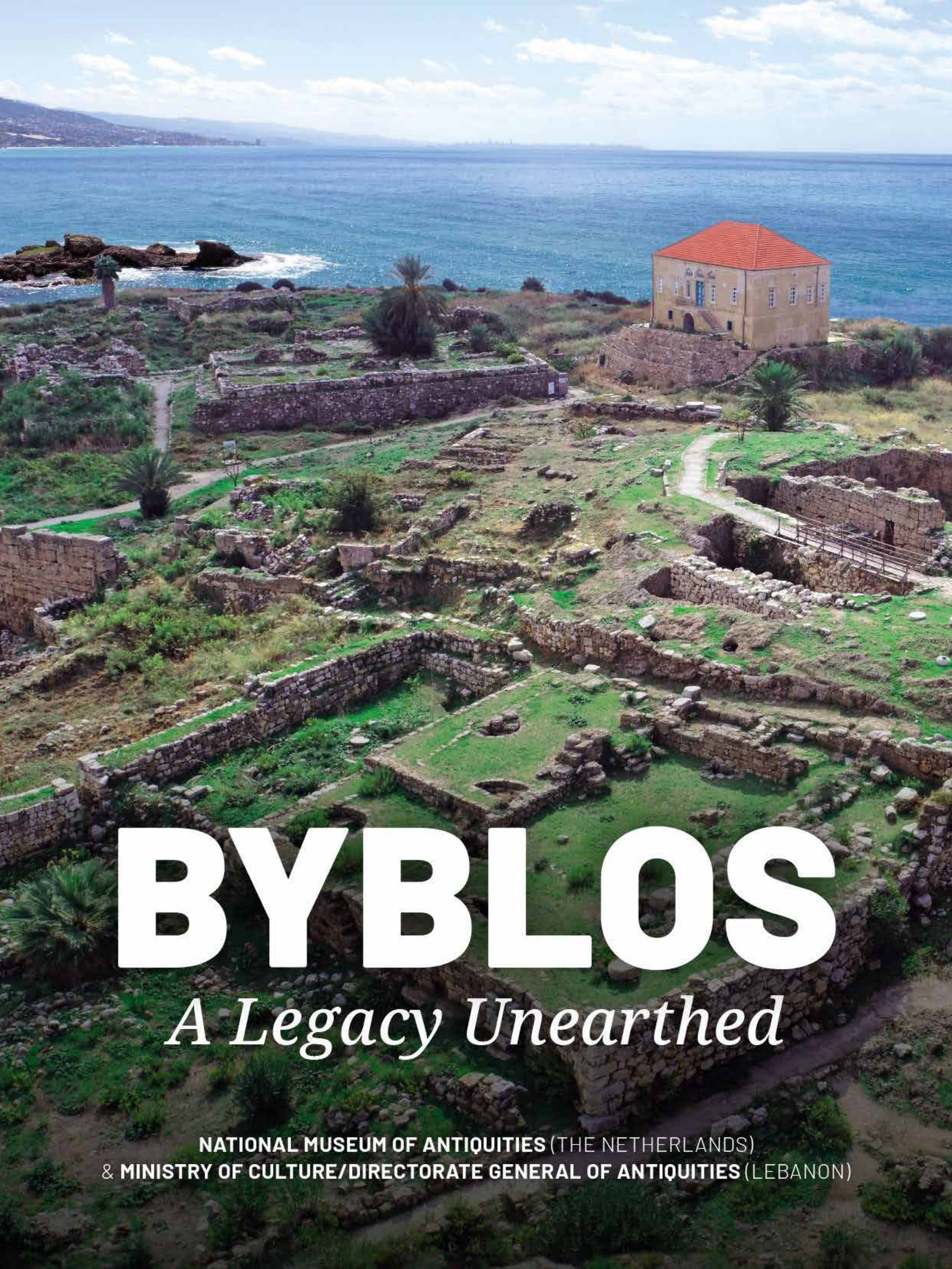


BYBLOS

A Legacy Unearthed

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES (THE NETHERLANDS)
& **MINISTRY OF CULTURE/DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF ANTIQUITIES** (LEBANON)

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Contents

PART IV: PROSPERING IN THE SHADOWS

16.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BYBLOS AND EGYPT DURING THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

Hanan Charaf

After an interruption at the end of the 4th millennium BC, relations between Byblos and Egypt resumed, spurred on by Egypt's insatiable need for cedar wood. As early as the 4th millennium BC, Byblos' monopoly of the exploitation of the lush cedar forests covering the northern part of the Mount Lebanon range was a lure to Egyptian power, hungry for the precious wood and resin used in construction and mummification. The relatively short distance between Egypt and coastal Lebanon, estimated to be 270 nautical miles, favoured direct connections. These relationships were sustained for the duration of the Old Kingdom (c. 2700-2181 BC) but came to a halt during the First Intermediate Period (c. 2181-2050 BC) when Egypt experienced a period of internal turmoil that led to the cessation of exchanges with the Levant and particularly with Byblos. The *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Fig. 16.1) written on the recto of a single papyrus during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2050-1650 BC) lamented the interruption of sailing to Byblos and the shortage of cedar resin and wood used in the mummification and burial processes (Gardiner 1909, 10, 32; Pritchard 1969, 441; Lichtheim 1973, 152).

It is not quite clear when exchanges with the new pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom resumed, owing to poor archaeological records from Byblos. But they must have commenced sometime in the 20th/19th century BC, if we refer to the cartouche of Senusret I, found on a limestone fragment (Ward 1971, 68) and to Egyptian pottery (e.g., *zir* jar type 2) dating to the 12th Dynasty (1991-1802 BC), found in the new French-Lebanese excavations of the South Gate (Charaf 2021a). There is also the Mit-Rahina inscription, found in Memphis and detailing activities of two regnal years of the pharaoh Amenemhat II (Marcus 2007, 171), or even earlier references, based on some Egyptian metal objects (Anubis-type metal sheet figurines, chisel, adzes and *mineb* axes) from the *Dépôts de Fondation* in the Baalat Gebal Temple that have good parallels in the mortuary temple of Montuhotep II (2061-2009 BC) in Deir el-Bahari (Miniaci and Saler 2021, 345-49). Egypt and Byblos speedily resumed their commercial relationship, using maritime trade practices already well established in the 3rd millennium BC (Ward 1963, 55-57; Marcus 2007, 145-46). Byblos reactivated a profitable trade network that offered Egypt a large selection of desirable commodities, either local or transhipped, that included precious metals (silver, gold, bronze, lead, copper), marble, dolerite querns, cedar, pine and olive aromatics, terebinth resin, medicinal plants, cedar wood, fig and sycamore trees, daggers and mirrors made of bronze, gold and silver, and cattle and small domestic animals. The Mit-Rahina inscription mentions a list of imported raw materials and finished goods,

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Figure 16.1: The *Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Pap. Leiden 344 recto) were written on papyrus during the Middle Kingdom. The author lamented the interruption of sailing to Byblos in chapter 3. AMS 27 sheet 2 © Dutch National Museum of Antiquities.

including a cargo consignment of 231 cedar logs, carried by two ships from the region of *Ḫnty-š* usually identified with the Lebanese coast (Marcus 2007, 139-41, 145, 150-54). It is still not clear whether these 'logs' were in fact beams or boards stored inside the hull, or actual trunks that were towed behind the ships as later illustrated in the famous reliefs from the palace of Sargon II (Khorsabad, Iraq), dated to the 7th century BC (Linder 1986; Reade 2018). Effective testament to the resumption of trade between these two powers are objects such as jars manufactured in Byblos and found in large quantities in the Southern Levant at Ashkelon and in Egypt (Kopetzky 2016, 157), as well as substantial amounts of local Levantine and Egyptian ceramic storage vessels, located in the South Gate area overlooking the newly located, ancient harbour of Byblos (Francis-Allouche and Grimal 2016, 2017). These jars had a capacity of 20-30 litres and carried perishable goods, some of which are mentioned in the Mit-Rahina text. Equally, the Tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan (1897-1878 BC), who served both pharaohs Amenemhat II and Senusret II, yielded a frieze of Asiatic people, the *Aamu*, arriving in Egypt, carrying the fenestrated duckbill axe (Fig. 16.2) known from many tombs in the Levant, including from the rock-cut Tomb 3 of the *Tombeaux de Particuliers* dug by Montet in 1924 and dated to the Middle Bronze Age I (Montet 1928a, 247; 1929, pl. CXLIX [nos. 940-41]) (Fig. 16.3).

The ease with which these exchange networks were restored, after a hiatus of a few centuries, attests to the prominent position that Byblos continued to hold at the end of the third and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, as the major supplier of cedar wood in the Levant. This is the only way to explain how this small city, only five hectares, entertained privileged relations with the mighty kingdom of Egypt and the vast and powerful kingdoms in Syria. The focal position of this metropolis, controlling access to the cedar forests, granted it a *de facto* predominance in international exchanges which is reflected in the large geographic distribution of Byblos' commercial jars and in the quantity of foreign artefacts imported to the site.

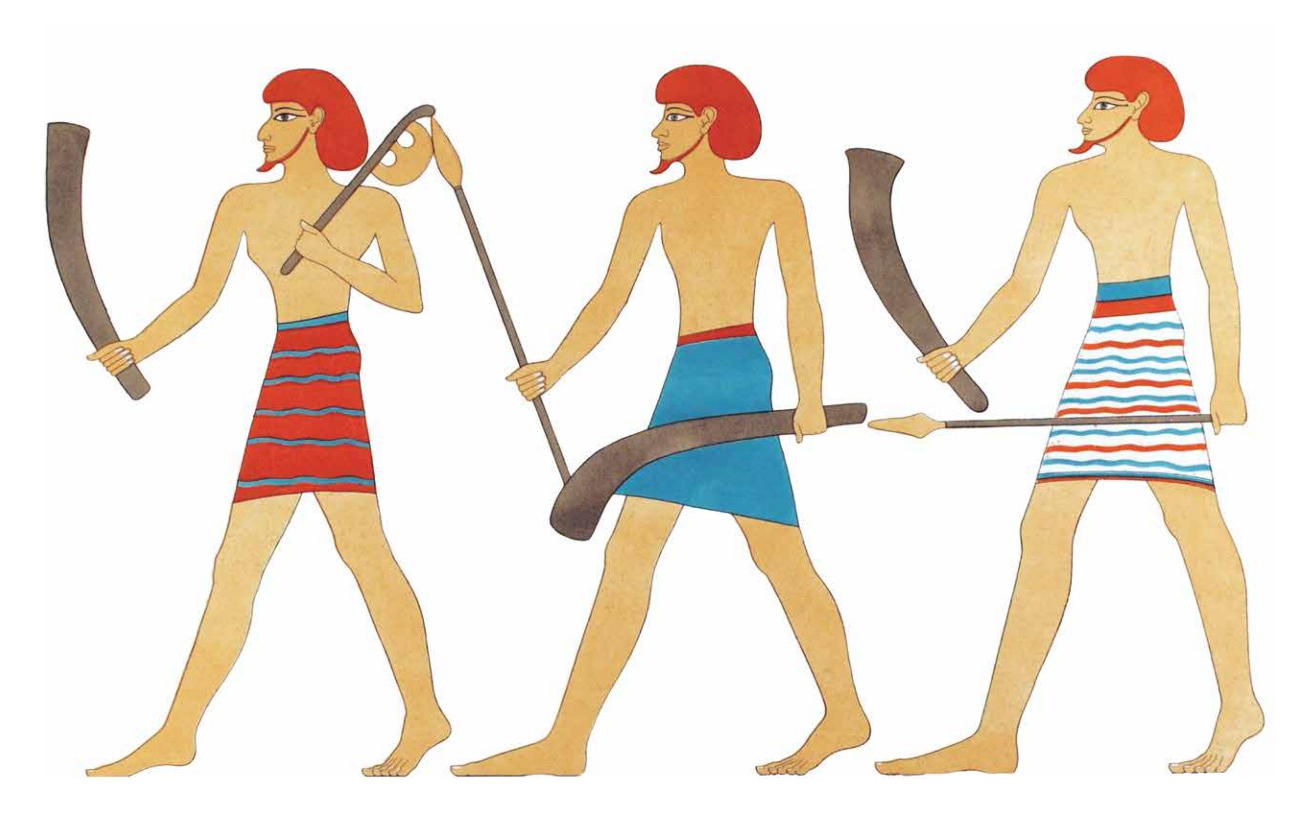


Figure 16.2: Procession of the Asiatic *Aamu*, Tomb BH14 of Khnumhotep I at Beni Hasan, reign of Amenemhat I (early 12th Dynasty). The far-left figure is carrying a fenestrated duckbill axe as known from tombs in the Levant. Reproduced after Lipsuis 1849, pl. 141.

Much has been written about the nature of the relationship between Egypt and Byblos during the Middle Bronze Age, and whether Byblos' princes or kings were vassals of Egypt or privileged rulers profiteering from Egypt's insatiable need for cedar. Already in 1961, Ward dismissed the proposition of Egyptian control of Byblos writing that, 'the appearance of foreign objects does not automatically presume foreign domination' adding that 'only when there is ample corroborating evidence can such material be so considered' and until then 'any supposed Egyptian rule [...] remains wholly in the realm of speculation' (Ward 1961, 132, 144). He stressed further that 'the imported Egyptian material at Byblos does not point to military or political domination' (Ward 1961, 134). What is certain, however, is that the princes of Byblos used the Egyptian title *haty-a* (Count) before their Semitic names, a title that could only be conferred by the pharaoh (Pritchard 1969, 229). At least six scarabs of Egyptian origin bear the inscription *ḥ3tj ' n Kbn* meaning 'High Official of Byblos' (Flammini 2010, 155). Textual evidence of these relationships, from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, is attested by a collection of texts found in Egypt called the Execration Texts, which are curses inscribed on potsherds and terracotta statuettes that mention the toponym Kbn(i), identified with Gubla/Byblos, together with two other toponyms recognized as the Lebanese cities of Arqa (*'Arqatum*) and Ullaza (Gerstenblith



Figure 16.3: Golden fenestrated axe found in a pottery jar buried in the courtyard of the Obelisk Temple. DGA 16139 © Ministry of Culture, Lebanon/Directorate General of Antiquities.

1983, 18-19; Posener 1940, 90 [E54, Arqa], 93 [E61, Arqa], 94 [E63, Byblos], 96 [F2, Ullaza]; Pritchard 1969, 329). It is not clear if the pharaoh cursed these Levantine cities and their rulers prophylactically assuming they might become hostile to Egypt or because he truly feared the power they actually wielded. Nonetheless, these texts argue that Byblos was a prominent city at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. This is supported by concrete evidence inferred from

archaeological material (for example, the Montet Jar found in the Baalat Gebal Temple), proving that Gebal sustained a continuous pre-eminence into the Middle Kingdom. Indeed, it seems that the destruction of the city during the last quarter of the 3rd millennium BC did not adversely affect the political and social structure of Byblos which was immediately rebuilt according to an urban layout (Saghieh 1983), and produced ceramic and metal objects found embedded in the northern cultural *koinè* of this period (Thalmann 2008). This situation is paralleled in northern Lebanon at Tell Arqa, mentioned also in the Execration Texts, where the city was rebuilt successfully after each destruction, during the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Also from this period, the *Tale of Sinuhe*, written during the reign of Amenemhat I of the 12th Dynasty, mentions Byblos as the place where Sinuhe fled after hearing of the plot to kill the pharaoh (Lichtheim 1973, 224; Pritchard 1969, 19; Simpson 1973, 60; see Chapter 18). It has been argued that this sole mention of Byblos demonstrates that, in Egyptian interactions with the Levant, the city of Byblos was not uniquely important (Marcus 2007, 173; contra Ward 1961, 152). However, the Egyptian scarabs found inside the Montet Jar are the earliest known to the Levant from this period (early 12th Dynasty) giving credible evidence of the strong ties that existed between Byblos and Egypt at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC (Ben-Tor 1998, 15). The 12th Dynasty Egyptian jars found in the South Gate excavations seem to lend credence to this date. The dearth of texts from the city itself has hindered our understanding of the exact nature of the relations between Egypt and Byblos. Indeed, the Byblos Syllabary is still undeciphered (Dunand 1945a; see Chapter 27) and the few inscriptions on the site do not offer pertinent insight except to indicate a certain preference for religious syncretism (Baalat-Hathor and Herishef-Rĕ). What we can extrapolate from these writings and from the mentions of Byblos in the Execrations Texts and in the archives of Zimri-Lim from Mari, where a text mentions a ruler (*lugal*) of Byblos named Yantin-Hammu (Albright 1965, 42; Kitchen 1967, 40; see Chapter 19), is that the city was an autonomous polity controlled by a ruler or 'prince', one of which is known beyond the border of his territory. Even though the extent of the territorial delimitations of Byblos during the Middle Bronze Age is still unknown, recent archaeological excavations identify close similarities between the ceramics produced in Byblos and those produced in sites situated in its vicinity; on the coast (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida; see Chapter 11), in the mountains overlooking Byblos (Qornet ed-Deir and Tell Kharayeb) and as far as the Koura region (Mgharet el-Houriyeh), located 50 km to the north. These similarities indicate the geographical extent of the region that the city must have controlled, in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Charaf 2021b, 212-13).

Almost no scholar believes today that Byblos was an Egyptian colony or under Egyptian tutelage, although this theory gained traction over the last century. Evidence rested solely on the large quantity of Egyptian or Egyptianised objects found on the site (for a complete list of the Aegyptiaca in Byblos see Ahrens 2020, 211-38; see Chapter 17). However, an abundance of foreign imports does not automatically equal foreign dominance. Similarly, academic literature suggesting that Byblos was either an Egyptianised Levantine centre or strongly influenced by Egyptian culture is also plentiful (Ben-Tor 1998, 15). The hypothesis of Egyptian emulation has been advanced many times to explain the abundance of Egyptian artefacts in the Levant (Higginbotham 1996, 155) contrasting with the one attributing the profusion of these products to royal Egyptian expeditions, at least during the Old Kingdom. The first excavator of Byblos, Pierre Montet (1928a, 92), categorised the city as 'petite Égypte'. Albright (1965, 41) argued that relationships intensified during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC and that Byblos was 'Egyptianised to an extent previously unknown'. He also presented the hypothesis that wealthy Egyptians may have fled to Byblos after the Hyksos' take-over of Lower Egypt. Ward (1961, 134) also spoke of Egyptian residents at Byblos without offering any supporting archaeological proof, other than the Egyptian objects found on the site. He even suggested that the Baalat Gebal Temple was Egyptian and served an Egyptian colony settled in Byblos (Ward 1963, 24). The Egyptian character of the temples of Byblos was proven wrong in more recent studies. We know that the layout of Byblos during the 2nd millennium BC is mostly inherited from the 3rd millennium BC city, with a collection of temples placed around the spring and residential quarters situated on the eastern, southern and western areas of the mound (Thalmann 1998, 51; see Chapter 14). However, new architectural styles were adopted, probably signalling the arrival of a new population (the Amorites?) which spread westward at the close of the 3rd millennium BC (Burke 2020). While the Baalat Gebal Temple kept an axial rectangular plan with an *in antis* porch of north Syrian origin (Lauffray 2008, fig. 201bis), the Obelisk Temple replaced the 3rd millennium L-Shaped Temple but was built according to a novel plan made of a combination of Broad-Room and Bent-Axis temples. Both of these were still foreign to Egyptian religious architecture (Bietak 2019).

Mention of frequent Egyptian emissaries to the Levant, where Egyptian must have been spoken, or at the least understood, attest alike to tight connections and to the degree of comfort that Egyptians felt in the land of Retenu (an Egyptian name for the Levant). Flammini (2010, 164) has pushed the emulation proposition to suggest that the need for Egyptian patronage on the part of the Byblos elite, through language, administrative titles and religious traits, was dictated by the competitive relationships between Levantine kings and princes. Through their close connection with the most prestigious power of the time, the kings/princes of Byblos not only enhanced their prestige but also extended and solidified their own considerable power over

the local, inter-regional and international trade. In short, to affirm its close relations with Egypt Byblos royalty, more than any other Levantine power, adopted the Egyptian habits and customs expressed in the titles, pantheon, cults and certain ceramic shapes. It is indisputable that Byblos was a trade emporium engaged in receiving and distributing goods, thus a foreign presence or representation in the city must be a reasonable assumption. To underline this point, the new ceramic assemblage collected from the South Gate excavations can be taken into account. Indeed, it contains a large sample of Egyptian jars made of Marl C-1, Nile C-2 and E-2 clays and Egyptianized vessels made with local clays from Byblos that could have either been made by Egyptian potters or by locals imitating Egyptian models. Certain pots, whose shapes and functions are foreign to Levantine customs, could arguably only have appealed to Egyptian natives who were visiting the city or were established there to conduct business (Charaf 2021a).

Evidently, the large number of Egyptian artefacts found in Byblos were deposited in what was termed by Dunand, *dépôts de fondation* (foundation deposits interred during the building of the sanctuary) and *dépôts des offrandes* (assemblage of offerings gifted to the temple). More than 40 deposits were found in the Baalat-Gebal Temple, the Obelisk Temple and the sacred areas of the Field of Offerings and the Sacred Precinct (*Enceinte Sacrée*). It is possible that these deposits were simply caches of precious objects interred in pits and large storage jars (Negbi and Moskovitz 1966, 22; see Chapter 21). From the Middle Bronze Age, the courtyard of the Obelisk Temple contained a sacrificial area and deposits/caches, as well as dozens of stone obelisks including one bearing a hieroglyphic inscription dedicated by the seal-bearer of King Abishemou, beloved of Herishef-Rê (Fig. 16.4). This Middle Kingdom era Egyptian god could be the deity to whom this temple was dedicated. Deposits in this temple yielded more than 1,306 *ex-votos* that included faience animal figurines, metal weapons and dozens of gilded bronze male figurines wearing the conical headdress known from Canaanite art.

The royal tombs are the most iconic indication of Egypto-Levantine connections and tombs I and II of the royal necropolis, discovered in 1922 (Virolleaud 1922; Montet 1928a, 143-238), yielded a large collection of Egyptian objects. Among them, the Tomb I of Abishemou contained an obsidian and gold vase (Fig. 16.5), inscribed with the throne name of Amenemhat III, while Tomb II belonging to the son, Abishemou-Abi, yielded a stone vase and obsidian box inscribed with the name of Amenemhat IV (Fig. 16.6). These objects allowed the tombs to be dated to the end of the 19th century BC. However, the conventional date of the Royal Tombs was questioned by Gerstenblith (1983, 38-41) who cast doubts on the MB I date attributed to Tombs I-III, owing to the presence of material that is dated to a later period. Indeed, slender dipper juglets with pinched spouts were already



Figure 16.4: Obelisk found in the Obelisk Temple bearing a hieroglyphic inscription dedicated by the seal-bearer of King Abishemou, beloved of Herishef-Rê. DGA 17917 © Ministry of Culture, Lebanon/Directorate General of Antiquities.



Figure 16.5: Obsidian and gold vase inscribed with the throne name of Amenemhat III found in Royal Tomb I of Abishemou. DGA 17308 © Ministry of Culture, Lebanon/ Directorate General of Antiquities.



Figure 16.6: Obsidian and gold box inscribed with the throne name of Amenemhat IV found in Royal Tomb II of Abishemou-Abi. DGA 17299 © Ministry of Culture, Lebanon/ Directorate General of Antiquities.

singled out as belonging to the terminal Middle Bronze Age (1650-1550 BC; Dever 1976, 11, 27). Additionally, dipper juglets covered with red slip found in Tomb I (Virolleaud 1922, pl. LXIII.1,3; Montet 1929, pl. CXVIII; Tufnell 1969, fig. 4.44-45) are known from the end of the Middle Bronze Age in the temple of Sidon (Doumet-Serhal and Shahud 2013, pl. 18) and from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age in a tomb at Tell Arqa (Charaf 2016, fig. 2.8). Recently, the work of Kopetzky (2016, 2018) who examined the Egyptian objects in the tombs of the Giblite kings Abishemou and Abishemou-Abi, challenged this chronological axiom and suggested a dating even later in the 2nd millennium BC. Contrary to the long-held belief that some of the luxurious presents were sent to the two Byblos kings from pharaohs Amenemhat II and Amenemhat IV, Koptezky argues that these two burials should be dated to the Second Intermediate Period and to the Hyksos reign in Egypt, and that the objects of the 12th Dynasty pharaohs are spolia brought to Byblos by Egyptians after the demise of the Middle Kingdom and sold as prestigious objects. A seal impression discovered at Tell el-Dab‘a (ancient Avaris) in Egypt, in a building that predates the Hyksos period, bears the name of *Ipi-shewmw, ruler of Reṯenw,* that could be assimilated to Abishemou from Tomb I (Kopetzky 2018, 352). Additionally, it looks like some of the prestigious objects found in the royal tombs have been intentionally modified to adapt to new markets. For example, inscriptions on the bases of three amethyst scarabs have been erased (Kopetzky 2018, 310-13). The looting of Egyptian monuments by the Asiatic Hyksos is well attested in Second Intermediate Period literature (Miniaci 2020, 9). In a recent article, Miniaci (2020, 1) concurred with this proposition arguing that the fall of the Middle Kingdom led to the looting and ‘recirculation of older Egyptian objects’ such as those found in Tombs I and II, initiating the internationalisation movement that characterizes the Late Bronze Age. Of course, this suggestion has met with some reluctance, given the looting that afflicted most of the royal tombs.

The relationship between Egypt and Byblos, based on the extensive exports of Levantine commodities to Egypt, continued to pursue the course set during the Early Bronze Age. However, it became stronger during the Middle Bronze Age, owing to the relatively peaceful conditions that characterised this period and the expansion of international markets triggering an active globalisation process. This intensification resulted in Byblos adapting Egyptian secular and religious customs, perhaps to call to the attention of other Levantine rulers the privileged relationship between Byblos and the superpower. During the Hyksos period (1650-1550 BC), Byblos continued to import looted Middle Kingdom artefacts in an attempt to sustain privileged supremacy and ‘ideological power’ over neighbouring cities (Miniaci 2020, 12). Whether this process is considered emulation in Byblos is still debatable, pending review of the archaeological material found during Dunand’s excavations.

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